

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

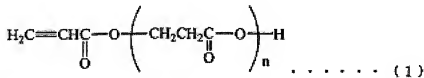
This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

Claim 1. (currently amended): A water-soluble thickener comprising a water-soluble ~~non-crosslinked~~ copolymer having a weight-average molecular weight of 6,000,000 or higher obtainable by polymerizing a monomer mixture which comprises 2-acrylamido-2-methylpropanesulfonic acid and/or a salt thereof and acrylic acid and/or a salt thereof ~~as essential components~~ and optionally other copolymerizable monomer components,

wherein 2-acrylamido-2-methylpropanesulfonic acid and/or a salt thereof is present in an amount of 20 mol% or more of all the monomers,

wherein the monomer mixture comprises a compound represented by the following formula (1):



wherein n is an integer of 1 to 12,

and/or a salt thereof as the other copolymerizable monomer components,

wherein the amount of the compound of formula (1) and/or a salt thereof, is in the range of 0.1 to 20 mol% based on the total moles of all the monomers, and

wherein the monomer mixture comprises 20 to 80 mol% of acrylic acid and/or salt thereof, based on the total moles of the monomers.

Claims 2-3. (canceled).

Claim 4 (previously presented): An aqueous acidic detergent solution which comprises a mineral acid and/or an organic acid and the water-soluble thickener according to claim 1.

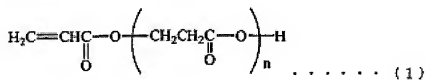
Claim 5. (currently amended): An aqueous acidic detergent solution which comprises 3 to 30% by weight of a mineral acid and/or an organic acid and 0.02 to 5% by weight of a water-soluble thickener according to claim 1 comprising a water-soluble copolymer having a weight-average molecular weight of 6,000,000 or higher obtainable by polymerizing a monomer mixture which comprises 20 mol% or more of 2-acrylamido-2-methylpropanesulfonic acid and/or a salt thereof, 20 to 80 mol% of acrylic acid and/or a salt thereof, and a compound formula (1) as defined in claim 1 and/or a salt thereof, in an amount of 0.1 to 20 mol%, wherein the amounts each are based on the total moles of all the monomers.

Claim 6. (currently amended): A thickening method comprising a step of adding the following water soluble ~~non-crosslinked~~ copolymer to an acidic aqueous solution or an acidic emulsion:

a water-soluble copolymer having a weight-average molecular weight of 6,000,000 or higher obtainable by polymerizing a monomer mixture which comprises 2-acrylamido-2-methylpropanesulfonic acid and/or a salt thereof and acrylic acid and/or a salt thereof ~~as essential components~~ and optionally other copolymerizable monomer components,

wherein the amount of 2-acrylamido-2-methylpropanesulfonic acid and/or a salt thereof is 20 mol% or more, wherein the monomer mixture comprises 20 to 80 mol% of acrylic acid and/or salt thereof is 20 to 80 mol%, each based on the total moles of the monomers,

wherein the monomer mixture comprises a compound represented by the following formula (1):



wherein n is an integer of 1 to 12,

and/or a salt thereof as other copolymerizable monomer components in an amount of 0.1 to 20 mol% based on the total moles of all the monomers.

Claims 7-12. (canceled).

Claim 13 (previously presented): An aqueous acidic detergent solution which comprises 3 to 30% by weight of a mineral acid and/or an organic acid and 0.2 to 5% by weight of the water-soluble thickener according to claim 4.

Claims 14. (canceled).

Claim 15: (previously presented): An aqueous acid detergent solution according to claim 4, wherein the detergent solution is strongly acidic.

Claim 17 (new): The water-soluble thickener according to claim 1,
wherein the amount of the compound of formula (1) is in the range of 0.5 to 15 mol% based on the total moles of all the monomers.